

## How to Avoid Holiday Weight Gain



By MOVE Coordinator Ashley Bremmer

**T**hose long-awaited, but sometimes dreaded holidays are fast approaching. They are anticipated because of the merriment they bring and the rekindling of family ties. Dreaded because it means we often throw caution to the wind when it comes to our schedules and maintaining healthy eating habits with all the festivities around us.

In order to help you enhance your state of mind for this season, we've compiled several tips to help you stay healthy.

**Be prepared.** Plan ahead if you will be eating out or celebrating by eating a small snack before you go. You will be less likely to overeat if you have not skipped meals before the event.

**Don't deny yourself.** Go ahead and allow yourself to have a taste. Choose the foods that are more special to you so that you can enjoy them. Try to balance those choices with low-calorie

veggies to help you feel full.

**Keep your hands and mouth occupied.** Try to focus on the social aspect of the day; keep busy in conversation and avoid sitting near the food. Try chewing gum or enjoying a mint and having a glass of water or other low-calorie beverage in your hand to avoid unconscious snacking.

**Slow down and listen to your stomach.** It takes 20-30 minutes for your stomach to signal to your brain you are full. Take sips of water, put your fork down or use your napkin during the meal. Watch for others who eat slower and try to mimic their speed. You will enjoy the food more while eating less.

**Watch the sweets.** Avoiding bringing tempting foods into your home if you do not feel you can avoid snacking on them. Discourage friends from bringing you food as a gift.

**Exercise.** Increase your activity during this time of year. Arizona has beautiful weather during the holiday season. Take more walks, eat outside and plan more activities.

**Avoid liquid calories.** Eggnog, hot chocolate, pumpkin lattes and alcoholic drinks can all add up. Be aware of the liquid calories you consume and fit them into your daily plan.

**Say "No" politely.** Be sure to stick to your goals and plans for the season. Don't let others pressure or guilt you into eating. If you feel the need to eat to make someone feel better, ask if you can take some home instead of eating more on the spot.

**Healthy lifestyle habits.** The goal is to limit your holiday eating to the few days a year that you celebrate. Avoid eating differently for the "season." Get back on track after each event, and you will get through the holidays without a hitch.

We wish you a happy and healthy holiday season. ■

# An Inside Look at the PVAHCS Cancer Program

By: Candi Rucker

As one of approximately 50 VA facilities with accredited cancer programs and one of only two within the Southwest Network, Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center has continuous accreditation since 1993. Accreditation by the Commission on Cancer (C of C) is a nationally recognized mark of excellence.

The Commission on Cancer sets 36 program standards designed to reduce the mortality and morbidity of patients with cancer. Because approved programs can offer a full range of services and a multidisciplinary approach to patient care, CoC approved facilities treat approximately 80 percent of newly diagnosed cancer patients in the United States.

Carl T. Hayden's cancer program consists of five core components consisting of clinical services, cancer committee, tumor board, quality improvement and the cancer registry. The program offers a full range of diagnostic and therapeutic clinical services either on-site or through referral. Imaging, pathology review, surgical interventions, chemotherapy, radiation oncology as well as supportive services such as support groups, palliative care and hospice are available.

The Executive Cancer Committee is a multi-disciplinary team tasked with goal setting, planning, initiating, implementing, evaluating and improving all cancer-related activities in the program.

A tumor board or tumor treatment conference is a multi-disciplinary conference which meets at 7:30 a.m. the second and fourth Fridays of the month in the ACC lower level conference rooms. Physician representatives review case data and provide recommendations for the consideration of the attending physician and patient. Physicians, residents, nursing and other staff involved in the care of cancer patients are encouraged to attend.

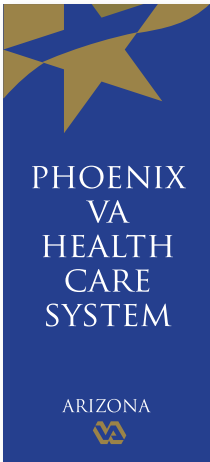
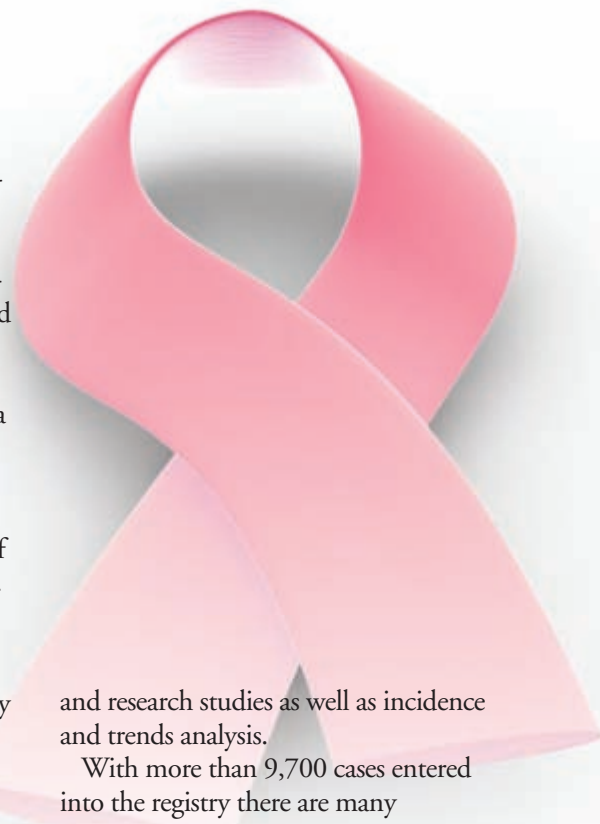
### Quality Improvement.

The Executive Cancer Committee initiates or provides guidance for a variety of quality improvement studies and projects focusing on patient outcomes and delivery of care. These studies are often conducted in partnership with the Quality Management department as well as other clinical departments and utilize data from the cancer registry. Studies may focus on treatment and survival patterns as well as timeliness.

The Cancer Registry collects data on diagnosis, treatment and survival for newly diagnosed cancer cases. These data are utilized in quality improvement

and research studies as well as incidence and trends analysis.

With more than 9,700 cases entered into the registry there are many opportunities for research, quality management and outcomes analysis. Data requests are welcome. The Cancer Program Web page contains patient care enhancements, annual reports, quality improvement studies as well as survival analysis. Please feel free to contact us to join in the dialogue on what we can do to help improve cancer outcomes amongst our patients. ■



**The Desert Sun** is a bi-monthly printed publication for VA staff, volunteers, our Congressional members, Veterans Service Organizations and the Phoenix community.

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# How Veterans Help Veterans in the CLC

By: Michelle Roberts

**K**orean War Veteran Harold Riffer spent most of his time in the service in Japan, and for the last 15 years, he has been an active volunteer for our VA Community Living Center, located off the first and second floors of the K and L wings at our hospital.

As a volunteer, Riffer has brought ample amounts of fun for Veterans as he brings horse racing to the facility allowing Veterans to win prizes by betting on prerecorded races. Veterans' "winnings" can be used in the Canteen store and the vending room.

The first races he shared were from a horse racing game, but over the years Riffer taped several live races so Veterans could get a more realistic experience. Riffer is ably assisted by Frank Rosenfield

and Lenora Rohm.

In addition to providing fast-track fun for Veterans, Riffer also plays the saxophone for CLC Veterans once a month continuing a skill he learned in the third grade. While he was stationed in Japan he played with several dance bands and orchestras.

As the commander of the Jewish War Veterans for the past seven years, Riffer and the JWV have provided much needed assistance for the CLC Veterans. During the holidays, they give gift certificates to Veterans in their rooms. They provide latkes for the Hannakuh service in the Chapel. They have donated refrigerators, TVs, the organ/piano and much, much more for our Veterans. They have assisted with making the rooms more home-like for



our resident Veterans.

With all that he has done for our VA CLC, he still finds time to support the Veterans in the Arizona State Veterans Home, Prescott VA and the Homeless Veterans. We cannot say enough how much Mr. Riffer and the Jewish War Veterans organization are appreciated by the CLC and our resident Veterans. ■

## VA Sponsored Vanpool

By: Stewart Candler

**A**s one who rides in a VA Vanpool I just have to share the benefits our group obtains from this effort.

It doesn't cost the rider any money to belong to a vanpool.

Your personal vehicle insurance cost may go down due to the shorter distance you are actually driving to work each day. My vanpool drives 31 miles each way daily. My insurance now charges for the one mile I drive each day to catch my vanpool instead of the 31 miles.

A big savings on gasoline. Each van has its own gas card and funds set aside for fuel. In my case approximately \$2,500 - \$3,000 per year depending on gasoline prices.

Fewer miles driven on your personal vehicle means a cost savings on tires, oil changes and normal wear and tear on your vehicle.

You get to park closer to the hospital facility in assigned parking daily.

You will get to know several of your

fellow employees like family.

You shouldn't have to drive in yourself every day. In my vanpool there are six drivers. I drive in once every six weeks for the week. The other five weeks I am a rider.

The amount of time you are riding can be spent napping, talking, reading or studying. The options are limitless. But, be respectful of your fellow riders.

Here are some more reasons to help you decide to ride in a vanpool. It opens up more parking spaces for those who "ride alone," and we all know what a nightmare parking is here on a daily basis.

If there is a day that you might have to leave early for an appointment, then you go by the vanpool area pickup and have another rider ride with you for that trip. If you need someone to ride home in the afternoon you can have someone from the vanpool ride back to the pickup point too.

If you should have to leave unexpectedly for any type of an emergency there are vouchers for a ride home or where ever you may need to go given by the company that leases the vans are for the vanpool.

If you just need to run a quick errand to have lab work done outside of work but nearby, for example, you should be allowed to use the van for that as well if you are a qualified driver.

Here's a final thought. For each mile shared by several folks vanpooling, there are less emissions generated that we all have to breath daily. For me, this is a big thing as I have a compromised respiratory system. I bet that you know several people in your life who might benefit from cleaner air as well.

There are many reasons to ride in a van pool, and all of them are great. After all we're VA Vanpoolers sharing the ride for cleaner air. ■



## Who are the VA Voices?



By Bridgette Henness

The melodic harmonies that often fill the halls of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center are from the VA Voices, a choral group of retirees, volunteers and VA employees. This group, which has been at the Phoenix VA since the early 1990s, donates their time to sing for the Community Living Center residents on special occasions.

The group has been invited to sing the national anthem at several Diamondbacks games, for the mayor at City Hall events and they have even appeared on the local news show fulfilling their mission of promoting patriotism.

They mostly sing patriotic songs but they also do holiday-themed programs for residents. When they are practicing for an upcoming program, their practice runs at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesdays.

Their chairman is Mike Money, and Joan Katzenberg is their musical director. They are always looking for new members. Membership is voluntary and they average around 15 members. If you're interested in joining this musical group and getting in on the "glee" contact Mike Money at ext. 5972. By the way, Money is looking for someone willing and dedicated enough to fill his shoes as chairman of the group.

The VA Voices can sing at your special holiday event, with a few weeks' notice. SO when you're in the mood for a patriotic choral group our VA Voices can be there to help share in the festivities.

## So what is Café Dining?

By Bridgette Henness



Café Dining serves up more than meals for residents of the PVAHCS' Community Living Center (CLC), it brings an enhanced quality of life to those residents.

"Food connects you with positive memories of family gatherings, celebrations and socializing with friends," says CLC dietitian Stephanie Moya.

"It reminds you of happier times (e.g. the apple pie Mom made, Christmas dinner with the family). Café Dining helps reconnect with the positive nature of food and socialization."

Café Dining allows our residents to be served in the dining room with VA staff assisting as hosts and hostesses for the residents for their meals. Gone are the food trays being dispensed through a chow line. Now there's meal options and friendly staff to assist the residents during meal time.

The Café Dining program was designed by a multidisciplinary group including CLC management, Food Service management, dietitians and recreational therapists. As a result meals service is offered seven days a week with breakfast at 7:30 a.m., lunch at 11:30 a.m. and dinner at 4:30 p.m.

Planning and discussion began in March. It took hard work and lots of staff reorganization to get off the ground. Engineering installed a special outlet for the hot food cart; the kitchen tray line was condensed to free staff for café positions; and residents were surveyed to develop enjoyable meal selections. Meals were coded in the Vista Nutrition Package, staff developed check-off lists and production report sheets. The initial trial was in April plus four different meals

in May. After a successful test run, the program went full time the first week of July.

CLC residents are given a Daily Chef special menu. If the special is beef stew and they don't like stew, they can choose from set comfort foods (entrées, vegetables, starches, breads, fruits, deserts and drinks). Every table has a number on a condiment caddy, just as you see at Denny's.

To make the Café a success surveys and other feedback mechanisms are used. Some changes made so far are "seconds" on eggs and cereal at breakfast, continuing alterations on meals and special items.

Residents indicated concern about orders being taken by location instead of time. As resolution, a color-coded flag system was designed. Average meals serve 30 patients; the first 10 arriving get green flags, next 10 yellow and the final 10 red. The color tells in which order to serve the food.

This program has significantly reduced wasted food (and labor cost associated with waste) since more of the meals are eaten.

Family members can purchase weeknight meals, all weekend meals and Government Holidays from room C234 (on 2C) Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. A meal ticket vending machine should be operational soon. Breakfast is \$3.50 while lunch and dinner are \$5.

With Café Dining in full swing our VA is creating the homelike, nurturing transformation of the nursing home setting to that of community care for our Veterans. ■

# VA Spotlight: Kevin Hardaway

By Elise Lenz

Kevin Hardaway, Housekeeping Aid, Environmental Management Services is a housekeeping aid within the EMS Service line at the Phoenix VA Health Care System. He has worked at the facility for the past three years.

Hardaway began his military service in the Army, serving for a 10-year period of time. During his tour of duty Hardaway was featured in an article "A Reality in Army Green," by Ellen Scarborough. At the same time the article was in print, he was the featured "Soldier of the Week." His commanding officers were quoted as

saying, "He did an outstanding job as a laundry and bath specialist, responsible for keeping the troops in clean clothes." Today similar statements are shared about Hardaway.

Hardaway is an outstanding VA employee. He consistently receives accolades and commendations for his workmanship, dependability and loyalty to the Veterans. He has demonstrated his training and leadership abilities and continues to be an asset to our medical center.

Thank you Kevin Hardaway for helping our VA provide Veteran Centered Care. ■



## PR PROVIDERS

Public Affairs Officer Paula L. Pedene APR often has to garner media assistance from staff for interviews and other information on a short turnaround basis for media queries. When staff assist our VA with media and other PR requests, Pedene recognizes them as PR Providers. This helps us provide our four-hour turnaround for media queries, and helps to support other special needs for public relations assistance. PR Providers earn recognition in this column and they receive a special token of appreciation for their PR efforts.

- ◆ Matthew Coleman, Leo Borquez, Joann Solomon and Janice Walla for your assistance with the Research ribbon-cutting event.
- ◆ Eva Gergely with your assistance at the Summer Sports Clinic, White Cane Day and other stories.
- ◆ Tom Hicks for your assistance with Sun Sounds radio support promoting White Cane Day.
- ◆ Cara Garcia for the "Pink Out" and photos.
- ◆ Mike Owens for your support with the Channel 15 story.
- ◆ Dr. Leslie Telfer for the assistance with the PTSD information for Channel 3.
- ◆ To Dr. Karen Kattar for her support with ASU Journalism students requesting subject matter experts for PTSD therapies.
- ◆ To Doug Mitchell, Michael Owens and Dr. Karen Kattar for their assistance with the three hour radio show on Saturday Nov. 5 with Vern Bagley's Voice of the Veterans.
- ◆ To Karen Ryan for her assistance in garnering information needed for an Arizona Republic story.
- ◆ To Gabrielle Duffey for serving as a Veteran Grand Marshal in the VA Veterans Day Parade and sharing the story of her military service as a Naval Reservist with media outlets.
- ◆ Darryl Simmons for your assistance with the VA Veterans Day Parade Floats and ensuring they arrived for the TV interviews at Channels 3, 5 and 12.
- ◆ Kevin Hardaway for you assistance with the Public Affairs Office clean-up after the parade.
- ◆ Michael Leon, Doug Mitchell and Melissa Meierdierks for your assistance with the news release on the national Secretary's Award for Homeless Veterans Support.



*Paula L. Pedene APR with a Silver Anvil Award presented by the Public Relations Society of America*

We thank you all for being PR Providers!



# Million Veteran Program: Partnering with Veterans to revolutionize health care

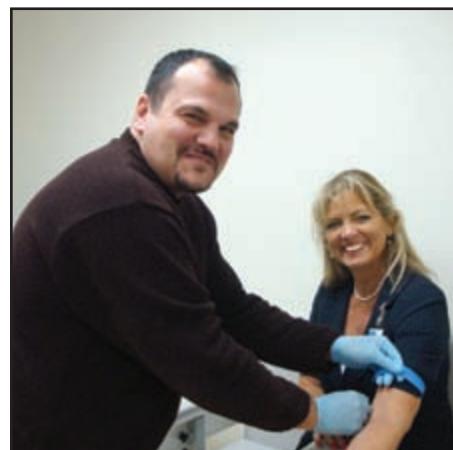
The Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix is one of 50 VAMCs selected across the nation to serve as an enrollment site for the Million Veteran Program (MVP), a research program that will help us better understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness. The ultimate goal of the program is transforming health care.

The Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development. MVP aims to enroll as many as one million Veterans during the next five to seven years. Participants will be asked to complete a one-time study visit (about 20 minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out health surveys, allowing ongoing access to medical records and agreeing to future contact. This research program will establish one of the largest databases of genes and health history. The results of MVP may lead to new ways of preventing and treating common illness.

Dr. Samuel M. Aguayo is coordinating the local effort with his team, Research Coordinator Providencia Morales and Research Assistant Michael Essian. The Phoenix VA Medical Center's goal is to recruit 4,000 Veterans this year alone. We are now enrolling and you can be a part of this National voluntary research program by visiting our Clinical Research Center Building 21 located on the northeast corner on the hospital's main campus.

By participating in MVP, Veterans will help contribute to the knowledge base that may result in developing personalized treatments for military-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as more common illnesses, like diabetes and heart disease. Results from MVP will help improve health care for Veterans and all Americans. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans personal information secure and confidential.

Participation will not affect access to health care or benefits. Visit the website of the Million Veteran Program at [www.research.va.gov/mvp](http://www.research.va.gov/mvp).



*Navy Veteran Susan Hall registers for the MVP program with MVP researcher Michael Essian.*

[research.va.gov/mvp](http://research.va.gov/mvp) to learn more. For more information or to participate, call toll-free **866-441-6075**.

Million Veteran Program (MVP) - MVP is a national, voluntary research program designed to study how genes affect health and illness. Call toll-free 866-441-6075 or visit the website: [www.research.va.gov/MVP](http://www.research.va.gov/MVP).

## The Phoenix VA Health Care System is all A Twitter and Networking on Facebook

Did you hear? The Phoenix VA Health Care System part of the social networking community on Facebook and Twitter!

### Become a fan!

Who's on Facebook? We are. The Phoenix VA Health Care System is on the world's leading social network, with more than 300 million users. Our Facebook page is a great way to keep in touch with friends, family and "fans." Organizations, businesses or products establish "fan pages" to communicate with their publics. You can find us at [www.facebook.com/PhxVAHealthcare](http://www.facebook.com/PhxVAHealthcare) and become a fan!

If you aren't on Facebook already, go

to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and create your account. Once you've created your account, look for the PhxVAHealthcare page and become one of our fans.

### Become a follower!

Perhaps the largest and fastest-growing information network, Twitter enables the Phoenix VA Health Care System to send and read messages—known as tweets—directly to subscribers, called followers. These tweets go directly to followers' Twitter accounts or their cell phones as text messages.

There are several ways to follow the Phoenix VA Health Care System on Twitter:

Already have a Twitter account? Look

for the Phoenix VA Health Care System at [www.twitter.com/PhxVAHealthcare](http://www.twitter.com/PhxVAHealthcare) and become a follower.

Or go to our Web site at [www.phoenix.va.gov](http://www.phoenix.va.gov) and click the Twitter button to become a follower.

iPhone users can download a Twitter application to be in the loop. New to Twitter and social networking? Sign up at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) to create your own twitter account.

We look forward to connecting with you socially!



# Construction Update

By Rick Mehrer



**T**he Phoenix VA construction program will see some exciting events in the next few months. Several construction projects will be completed and activated for use by our Veterans. In addition, several projects will begin that will greatly improve Veteran care and increase the space at the Phoenix VA. Projects scheduled for completion include:

- Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Women's Clinic: First floor B-Wing (old Director's Suite) is currently being renovated for the new OEF/OIF and Women's Clinic. It is expected to be completed this month and activated in January.
- Specialty Care Addition: The Ambulatory Care Clinic basement area will be converted to compensation and pension clinics, and office space for mental health and nuclear medicine. Construction will be completed this month and activated in January.

Projects scheduled to begin include:

- Plumbing Phase 7 and Operating Room repairs: This project will begin in the D-tower and Operating Room Suites in January.
- New Mental Health Building: This new three-story, 41,000 square feet facility is to be located adjacent to the main hospital. It will house the residential treatment program and other mental health functions. Construction is expected to begin in January.
- Rehabilitation Building: This new two-story, 28,000 square feet facility is to be located adjacent to the D-wing. It will house rehabilitation services.

We should all be proud of these activities as this is the realization of hard work and sacrifice by the entire Phoenix VA community ■

## Our Patients Tell Us

I was not feeling well for a couple of weeks and called to see if I could get in to see the Doctor. Bertha was very friendly and understanding, making an appointment for the next day. Knowing Denise has many Veterans to care for, I was trying not to take much of her time. I have many problems, While trying to focus on new conditions only, other problems came up and Denise asked what is bothering me. She took time to look at six or more problems. Denise made multiple appointments and consulted doctors in my present. Denise made me feel my medical problems were important. Thank you very much. Over the next two weeks, Starla and Bertha were staying in touch with me helping to ensure my appointments were being made and checked on my condition. My blood and urine did not show why I was having all these problems. I received a letter noting my Hep. C Load was high. This explains what is going on I think.

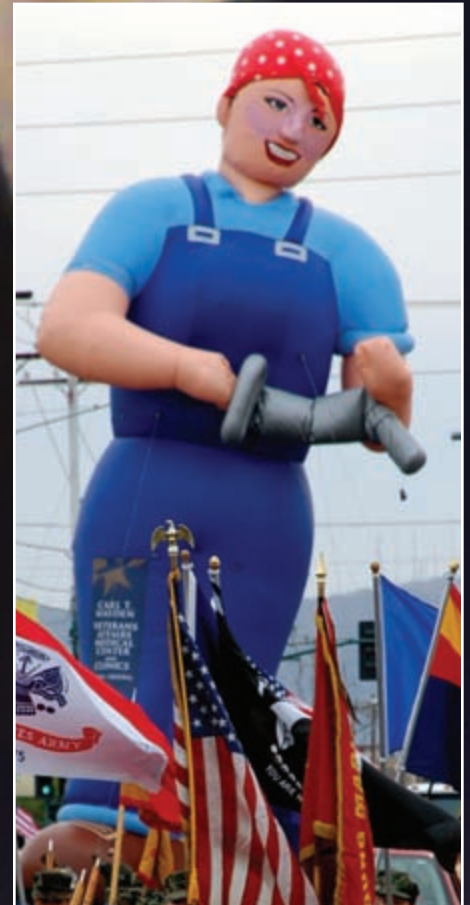
Knowing people and family members who talk bad of the VA upsets me. I explain to them I have great care, and maybe they are not communicating or following their medical care plan. Thank you, and please thank Denise, Starla and Bertha.

Sincerely,  
David Walker



# VA Veterans Day Parade

This year's VA Veterans Day Parade, Veterans Our Resilient Heroes was significant as this day fell on 11-11-11 which happens only once every 100 years. VA wishes to thank all of our parade entries, our parade volunteers, our sponsors and the Phoenix community for their outstanding support of this event that honors our nation's Veterans. We had 105 entries and 40,000 people on the street to watch our parade go by. Here are some highlights. For more photos go to [www.billpedene.smugmug.com/Parade](http://www.billpedene.smugmug.com/Parade). Enjoy.









# Annual Leadership Development Program Participants Graduate

The Phoenix VA Health Care System leadership is proud to announce the 16 graduates of its leadership programs. The Education Service offers three leadership programs each year for employees: School At Work, Leadership Initiative Training for Employees and Leadership Development Institute.

All three programs recently concluded for the year and the graduates of the 2011 SAW, LITE, and LDI programs all deserve congratulations. Our facility is fortunate to have people who are interested in becoming leaders to help ensure our Veterans receive the care they deserve.

The Veterans Health Administration's Healthcare Talent Management (HTM) national program staff is dedicated to the workforce succession and development missions. At a time when qualified, skilled staff members are in short supply, and impending retirements threaten to make the supply even smaller, VISN and facility leadership programs form the building blocks that provide employees the potential for job advancement, retention, and further career development. These programs can help employees prepare for college; transition to new positions within the hospital; improve their knowledge of the operations of the PVAHCS, VISN 18, and the VHA; and develop skills necessary for effective leadership.

## School At Work

The aim of the SAW program is to build a career ladder in health care and develop a more skilled workforce from within our organization. The program helps entry-level health system employees here gain education and resources to go to college and prepare for career advancement. SAW is a local, two-course program provided over an eight-month period. The program is intended for hospital employees, regardless of occupation, in the grades of GS-1 through GS-5, WG-1 through WG-3, or equivalent and is an opportunity

for employees to continue to retain their pay while attending class during their regular duty day.

## 2011 SAW Graduates

Jesus Campos  
Food Service Worker  
Christopher Chesson  
Nurse Assistant  
Tina Etsitty  
Medical Supply Technician  
Cynthia Gonzalez  
Food Service Worker,  
Michelle Lee  
Food Service Worker

## Leadership Institute for Employees

The Leadership Initiative Training for Employees is a local program that helps participants learn more about the operations of the PVAHCS, and prepares them to expand and enhance their contributions to the medical center. The eight-month program is open to permanent employees, regardless of occupation, who are grades GS-5 thru GS-9 or equivalent. Under the guidance of a mentor, participants attend clinical and administrative committee meetings, meet periodically with service line administrators and attend professional development training programs and/or seminars. This training includes field trips to the VISN, the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA), a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), and



2011 SAW Graduates: Left to right - Back Row: Jesus Campos, Michelle Lee, Front Row: Tina Etsitty, Cynthia Gonzalez-Teninty, Not Pictured: Christopher Chesson



2011 LITE Graduates: Left to right - Back Row: Damian Reese, Katherine Watson, Front Row: Steve Levesque, Jose Suero, Cory Baugh, Leslie Berry, Not Pictured: Marcia Weiss

the VA national cemetery. Each member develops an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and completes an individual and group project.

## 2011 LITE Graduates

Cory Baugh  
Patient Services Assistant  
Leslie Berry  
Patient Services Assistant  
Steve Levesque  
Medical Support Assistant  
Damian Reese  
Secretary  
Jose Suero  
Patient Services Assistant  
Katherine Watson





*The 2011 LDI program graduates from PVAHCS are (seated) Paul Coupaud, Isabel Kozak, (standing, from left) Reem Haddad and Tiffany Potter.*

Lead Accounts Receivable  
Technician

Marcia Weiss  
Patient Services Assistant

## Leadership Development Institute

The LDI program enhances the leadership development of high potential employees who are interested in advancing to leadership positions in the future. Participants who complete this program are added to the national database of individuals who have completed the VISN LDI programs. This nine-month program is open to employees in grades GS-9 through GS-13, WG equivalent, or Title 38 equivalent positions (including physicians); and entails three separate weeks of travel for training during the program. The PVAHCS LDI program operates together with VISN 19 and the student body is comprised of participants from facilities across both VISN 18 and 19. This national program is used throughout each VISN across VA to help selected employees receive leadership training at a higher level than offered at the local facility. The program entails in-depth association with an assigned

mentor, multiple leadership development opportunities, and projects, and is an opportunity to learn more about the VA system as a whole. It requires a weekly commitment for required homework as well as time needed to work with an assigned group in completing a group project.

## 2011 LDI Graduates:

Paul Coupaud  
Visual Information Officer

Reem Haddad  
Physician

Isabel Kozak  
Nurse Practitioner

Tiffany Potter  
Nurse Manager

Please congratulate all these leadership program graduates for their successes and for taking an active interest in their personal and professional development for tomorrow and beyond! ■

## VA Recognizes Outstanding Achievements in Homeless Programs

WASHINGTON – The best facilities, employees and civilian providers working to eliminate homelessness among Veterans were recently honored by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“VA’s commitment to end homelessness among America’s Veterans is being fulfilled by the hard work, innovation and dedication of thousands of VA employees and civilian partners,” said Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould.

Gould’s remarks came at the annual Secretary’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Service to Homeless Veterans ceremony.

At the Phoenix VA Health Care System one Individual VA employees, Melissa Meierdierks, social worker, earned top honors for her efforts in this regard.

Her bright blue eyes light up the room. Her colleagues say Meierdierks is by far one of the best social workers in the country.

“Her commitment and vocation of working with homeless Veterans as a Grant Per Diem Liaison (GPD) reflects in her actions in establishing 1,413 homeless Veteran contacts within the Phoenix Metropolitan area,” says Michael Leon, Homeless Veterans Program Manager. “In addition she’s directly responsible for the case management and the discharge of more than 400 Veterans within three transitional housing programs,” he added.

When the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program experienced a growth spurt of two additional transitional housing programs, Meierdierks immediately took the responsibility of adding an additional 45 beds for homeless Veterans to her case load and managing an additional \$250,000.00 of transitional housing funds. Her action was pivotal in ensuring continuous and seamless transitional care for several hundred more Veterans throughout the year.

In Fiscal Year 2011, homeless Veterans received approximately \$3.5 billion in VA health care and approximately \$800 million in specialized homeless programs. VA estimates nationally that about 76,000 Veterans are homeless on a typical evening. At-risk veterans, the families of homeless Veterans and the families of at-risk Veterans are also being helped by educational, vocational, counseling and job-search programs to deal with the factors that lead to homelessness.

The Phoenix VA Homeless Veterans Program offers a free lunch to homeless Veterans each day outside the Integrated Services Building 4 and can be reached for services at (602) 277-5551 ext. 1-7640.



*Melissa Meierdierks*

# EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

By Victor L. Nickson, PSA Turquoise Clinic

## October

Erma Loft, MSA, CLC-1, is the October Employee of the Month.



*Erma Loft*

Loft has done some truly amazing things both within VA and the outside community. For example, she was not satisfied with just directing Veterans to the in-house notary for their needs; she earned her own notary's license. Now

she is her own, self-contained one-stop Veterans help-center.

Loft often buys needed equipment and supplies for the first floor hub of the Community Living Center (CLC), earning her the name "Office Max."

As a sign of her commitment to Veterans, which expands beyond her official duties at VA, Loft takes treats and homemade salsa to the Sun City Veteran Senior Community to show her appreciation to the many Veterans there.

She has the trust and respect of all staff, Veterans and their families. She ceases all activity, and stands at attention at the

sound of the home-going hymn playing over the intercom system, honoring the Veterans when they pass away.

Loft's professional work excellence, commitment and compassion combined are among the best in the VA system. She raises the bar by continuing to push for self-improvement, while at the same time, lifting those around her, too. In fact, staff say the word "remarkable" best describes Loft as an outstanding VA employee. ■

## November

Amber Davenport, Nursing Assistant, Inpatient Psychiatry, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, has been selected as the November 2011 Employee of the Month.



*Amber Davenport*

Davenport makes each day's work environment a better place for all of those with whom she comes

in contact. She does this by providing superb Veterans-centered care to our Veterans.

Her commitment to a high work ethic is exemplified by her joyfully taking on assigned and unassigned tasks with style, grace, efficiency, proficiency and aplomb.

She respects Veterans and has gained their respect in return. Her compassion towards her patients is illustrated by her ability to empathize with Veterans and walk a mile in their shoes.

The singular thing that separates

Davenport from others is her willingness to give back, to give of herself to the real American heroes.

Patients often ask for her by name and their families often send her "thank you" notes for the care she has provided their loved ones.

Davenport is a true asset to this organization and VA is proud to call her "one of the best." ■